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February 1946

Reserve

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Bureau of Agricultural Economics

FARM-POPULATION ADJUSTMENTS FOLLOWING
THE END OF THE WAR

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Based on current field reports
made by professionally trained
observers in a national sample
of 71 counties.

Return Migration Occurring.—Current reports made during the last 4 months of 1945 on a national sample of 71 counties indicated that a substantial return migration to farms started in many parts of the country after Japan was defeated. The most important and most widespread change in the farm population which took place after the end of the war was the return of demobilized veterans. A fourth to a half of the boys and men who had entered the armed forces from these counties had returned home by Christmas. Former migrants to war industry and other urban employment were also reported to be returning to rural areas in several of the counties studied because of cut-backs and lay-offs in war manufactures. The end of the war also brought an end to many of the nonfarm jobs to which part-time farmers and members of their families had been commuting.

Is Back-to-Farm Migration only Temporary?—The most striking thing about the return migration to farms shortly after the war was that local informants could not usually tell whether the migration was merely temporary or represented a permanent increase in the farm population. Almost everywhere, returning veterans were "resting" for a while after discharge before taking active steps to locate permanent jobs. They may or may not decide to remain in rural areas. Many farm-reared sons and daughters who were laid off in urban centers also took the opportunity to pay an extended visit back in the home community before beginning to look for another job.

Reports from these 71 sample counties indicated that by the end of 1945, the prospects for final adjustments that will be made by persons who left agricultural work in wartime were by no means clear. Local people thought that much depended on what happened with respect to national economic conditions, especially as these were reflected in farm prices and in opportunities for nonfarm work. Many farmers expressed views that farm workers who migrated to war industry would not be available for hired farm work as long as they can get other work. But most predict a big return to farms in case of a depression.

Return Migration Varies.—Return migration to farms was light in counties of the Wheat Belt and Range-Livestock Region which were far away from war industry centers. It was also light in Dairy Belt counties which were very near industrial centers because in these places farm people had

often not left during the war, as they could continue living on farms and commute to town or city jobs. On the other hand, heavy return of wartime migrants was reported in some of the poorer self-sufficing counties of the Southern Appalachians. Most of the major type-of-farming belts showed a wide range of differences among counties within the belt mainly because of county location with respect to industrial work during the war.

CORN BELT

Prospects Bright.-In the Corn Belt counties studied, no serious reemployment problems of persons returning to farms had yet developed, and the prospects were generally described as bright. In those counties in which considerable nonfarm work had been done by farm people during wartime, the industries were of a type which will give peacetime employment as well. Returnees to farms in the counties that had little industry were not expected in larger numbers than could be reabsorbed in agriculture.

In half of the Corn Belt counties studied, there had been no special wartime movement from the farms into industrial work. Profitableness of farming in three of these counties contributed to keeping farm-to-city movement near prewar rates. Moreover, there was little backed-up reserve of underemployed manpower on farms in these counties when the United States entered the war. In the fourth county, availability of nonfarm jobs within commuting distance, reduced the need for migration from farms.

COTTON BELT

No Large Unemployment Reported.-In the Cotton Belt counties studied, there were no reports of serious unemployment problems arising from returns of veterans and migrants. Attitudes and predictions of local informants concerning Negroes who had left farms for war work were mixed. Many farmers would like to see them return to insure an ample labor supply, but many predict they will not return unless there is a depression. The Chamber of Commerce of one Delta County has written letters to mayors of several Northern cities indicating that this county would welcome 3,000 Negroes from these cities if urban unemployment became large.

In the eastern part of the Cotton Belt, especially, textile mills, box factories, and other small industrial establishments which tend to be dispersed are in many cases continuing high levels of production and providing off-farm work to farm residents. Textile mills have customarily employed many women and will continue to do so, but in some other types of plants employers are replacing wartime women workers with men.

Most of the counties studied in the Cotton Belt were characterized by a labor surplus before the war and had experienced fairly high rates of migration from farms during the war. Differences in migration from farms among the tenure and race groups were noted in a number of the counties. Tenure differentials were fairly consistent: farm laborers had the highest rates of migration from farms, sharecroppers next, tenants next, small owners next, and substantial owners the lowest rates. In roughly half of the counties studied in which Negroes make up an important part of the farm population, it was reported that they had migrated in relatively greater

numbers than whites, while in the other counties either whites had migrated in greater numbers or comparative rates could not be estimated.

In the counties that reported lower migration rates for Negroes, such factors as lack of skills, racial barriers to employment and special efforts made by operators of large farms to hold their farm labor inhibited the movement of Negroes to some extent. In counties where Negroes had exceeded whites in rates of migration from farms, this may have been primarily a matter of difference in tenure or economic group, as there is a larger than proportionate number of Negroes in the lower tenure status groups which had higher migration rates.

DAIRY BELT

Off-farm Work Substituted for Migration.—Adjustment problems in farm population faced in the Dairy Belt, were not so much those of returning migrants as of persons living on farms who had lost nonfarm jobs. During the war the counties had experienced less migration from farms, but a great increase in off-farm work of farm residents. In many industrial counties where dairying is the predominant type of farming, considerable temporary curtailment of industrial work occurred in reconversion of certain industries to production of civilian goods but most of these were back in production by the time the counties were visited. Some farm residents who lost war jobs shifted to other industrial jobs, and many got work in the service establishments which were expanding after wartime curtailment. In most of the counties studied there was considerable shifting from one nonfarm job to another by farm residents after the war ended, but no serious problems of unemployment.

Elimination of overtime, and the reduced take-home pay caused many workers living on farms to quit their nonfarm jobs. In other places strikes or temporary lay-offs were going on, and the workers who were living on farms were less adversely affected than those paying urban rents. In one Dairy Belt county, it was reported that the lower take-home pay for industrial work after elimination of overtime had meant that some workers had shifted back to work on dairy farms. But in most of the Dairy Belt, farmers were still reporting a shortage of year-round dairy hands in the early winter of 1945. For the wages offered, many veterans and war industry workers considered that dairy work demands too long hours.

GENERAL AND SELF-SUFFICIENT REGION

Return to Poorer Areas.—A large number of veterans are returning, at least temporarily, to farms in the poorer part of this area. Migrants from northern war industry centers are also reported to be returning. Subsistence farming offers meager money returns, and off-farm work is not available to an important extent in many of these counties. Nor is there much demand for hired farm hands except for short periods at harvest. Movement back to the farms in some counties is partly of a seasonal nature, as some part-year farmers are returning from summer and fall field work in other States.

In the northern part of the general farming belt, counties near cities reported occupational adjustment problems of farm people similar to those in counties where dairying is predominant. Near the end of 1945 there was considerable shifting from war jobs to other nonfarm jobs by farm residents - many to employment in services which were curtailed during the war.

RANGE-LIVESTOCK REGION

Migration from Farms was Permanent. - Counties studied in the Range-Livestock Region reported that little return migration to farms had occurred. Informed local people do not expect much, because the area is generally not industrialized and the people who left during wartime recognized that they were making a permanent shift. Many of these went to the West Coast. It was reported that a limited number of farm laborers could return and find work, especially as sheep-herders, because availability of labor was expected to reverse the wartime trend toward curtailment of sheep raising in favor of beef production. Likewise, a few ranch hands would be welcomed in some of the counties of this area. But the prospects for returnees to acquire farms to operate are slim except for sons of ranchers.

WHEAT BELT

Little Return Expected. - Prospects for postwar adjustments in farm population in counties studied where wheat is predominant are somewhat similar to those in ranching counties. The areas have little industry and the wartime migrants are not expected to return. Some were reported to have returned to look the situation over since the war ended, only to decide there was not enough opportunity by way of farm or other employment to induce them to stay.

The trend toward more mechanization and even larger size of farming operations continued during the war, which meant that fewer returnees would find chances to operate wheat farms, except sons or sons-in-law of wheat farmers. In the winter wheat area, wartime saw an increase in the purchase of extensive holdings by town business men who usually raise only wheat on their farms. Such farms require a minimum of labor which can usually be supplied by 2 months of hired help during summer harvest and fall seeding.

WESTERN SPECIALTY CROP AREAS

Acute Housing Problems. - In the months following V-J Day, Western Specialty Crop counties were undergoing rapid changes in population. In these areas, great numbers of seasonal farm laborers do not live on the farms, but in cities, towns, or villages. Hence, shifts in the nonfarm population as well as in the farm-resident population involve persons dependent upon agriculture for a livelihood. The following report on one county illustrates a situation of great in-migration since the end of the war.

"The problem in the county at present is: What can we do with all the people? Every available house, shack, tent, and shelter is already filled. Yet more people are coming in every day and looking for a place to stay. There are plenty of jobs as yet but people can't take them because they can find no place to live. After sleeping in their cars for four or five nights they get discouraged and move elsewhere. Okies who decide to return to Oklahoma after several years in the shipyards or in farm labor are disposing of their trailer houses for more than they paid for them.

"What are the sources of this movement and how long is it likely to last? First of all a large number have come in from the Pacific Coast defense industries at Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Diego, Portland, Seattle, and other points. Employment in those areas is already down to pre-Pearl Harbor levels and almost two million workers have been forced to seek other work. The bulk of this movement has already taken place and it will dwindle down to a mere trickle.

"Second, veterans constitute an important element. Almost as many of these are from other parts of the country as from the county. Part of their training was taken in California, they liked it, and decided to come here to live after the war. This movement is just beginning and should bring thousands of persons of all economic and social strata to the county.

"Third, the usual Westward surge of people from Oklahoma, Arkansas, Texas, and other parts of the nation has been resumed. They have more money than their predecessors in the thirties, but are looking for work, for farms, or for small businesses. This movement has just started and is likely to continue even after all farm and town jobs have been filled.

"Agricultural, employment, welfare, and other officials in the county are worried. The slack period in employment in the county will start in February and last through April. And many workers have spent all their money from day to day. Most of them are in a less docile mood than they were in the thirties. Unless something is done to maintain the level of employment there may be trouble before the winter is over. Each community in the county has a work-pile of emergency jobs to be inaugurated when the days of slack employment come, but those may not be adequate if new floods of migrants keep moving into the county.

"Some workers definitely look forward to the return of the WPA. They lived fairly well on it in the thirties and have no fear so long as there is a prospect for the inauguration of another. Panhandling has already become common on the streets, and welfare officials are preparing for difficult times. During the summer and fall the situation should become easier as people will find employment in the fruit harvests and in canneries and packing plants. The winter of 1946 may again be severe. This will largely depend on national economic conditions and whether the local business and agricultural expansion will continue. Even at that time, however, it is anticipated that housing conditions will be as tight as at present."

OTHER AREAS

Seasonal Movements Obscure Permanent Migration.—In addition to these major type-of-farming belts which include nearly nine-tenths of the country's farms and farm people, there are scattered counties, mainly along the Gulf and Atlantic seaboard, in the cut-over areas of the Great Lake States, and in some general farming areas of the West Coast which include very diverse types of farming. In some of these where seasonal migration of farm labor is normally important, as in the Florida citrus area, the arrival of citrus pickers in the fall of 1945 along with other winter increase in population obscured more permanent changes in population. Similarly in the case of a Gulf Coast county, return of migrants from Southern war-industry centers for the cane harvest in November and December could mean merely a resumption of a prewar custom when many former residents came back each year for "grinding."

In the fruit and vegetable areas along the Middle Atlantic coast, there had been little migration from farms during the war, since farm workers could shift to industrial work and continue to live on farms. In this area, industrial lay-offs had affected many farm residents, but most of them had been able to get other nonfarm work and there was little unemployment.